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The Uanki State among the Bacairi
[O Estado de Uanki entre os Bakairí]

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[Title page]

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121 756 784 In order to protect themselves against the numerous supernatural dangers that surrounded them, the Bakairí /Bacairi/ made use of two methods: shamanism and the uanki state, or ritual seclusion. The aim of this article is to examine these two methods of Bakairí culture in the light of data gathered by us (1) and with the help of the existing relevant

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1. The data that we present were gathered in 1947, during a visit to the Simões Lopes Indian Post of the Indian Protection Service, which was sponsored by the School of Sociology and Political Science of São Paulo in collaboration with the Institute of Social Anthropology of the Smithsonian Institution. Except where specifically mentioned in a footnote, the data mentioned were obtained from the Simões Lopes Indians.

114 121 literature. However, although the Bakairí have been visited from an early date by several ethnologists and their customs have been mentioned in the literature to support ethnological theories, very little is yet known on their culture as a whole. Most of the reports left by scholars do not give a rounded view of Bakairí culture and focus rather on their technology. On [179] the other hand, the present-day Bakairí are quite acculturated, and it is difficult to obtain complete data on their old culture. We shall attempt nevertheless to try to contribute here to a clarification of the problem.

161 The Bakairí now number about 250 individuals, according to the estimates of the Indian Protection Service, /260/ in 1947. They live in aldeas in Mato Grosso, at the Simões 131 361 Lopes Post of the Indian Protection Service, on the banks of the Paranatinga River, and in groups scattered along the

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131 Rio Novo, also in that state. The Simões Lopes Indians claim
361 that in the past all the Bakairí lived in aldeas by the Parana-
173 tinga River, moving later to the north under pressure of enemy
131 groups. (2) Later on the tribe divided as a result of internal
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2. For a better discussion of the possible origins of the Bakairí, see Max Schmidt's article, "Los Bakairí" /The Bacairi/, Revista do Museu Paulista, New Series, Vol. I, pp. 11-58, São Paulo, 1947.

[113]

disputes; part moved to the banks of the Rio Culiseu, one of the sources of the Xingu, and the other part was distributed along the Rio Novo. Perhaps the truth about these reports can only be obtained with the help of archaeology. Meanwhile, the old villages of the Bakairí on the sources of the
619 Xingu no longer exist. The Xinguano Indians suffered a great
175 deal from repeated outbreaks of influenza, and the last
931 Bakairí found in that area were brought to the Simões Lopes
648 Post a few years ago by officials of the Indian Protection Ser-
166 vice. The Rio Novo Bakairí, practically as a whole, adopted
619 the customs of the neighboring Brazilian populations and live
177 independent of the control of the Indian Protection Service.
184 As for the Simões Lopes Indians, although they are quite
[178] acculturated, they still retain many traits of their old culture, they all still speak Bakairí, and some of them still remember the time when they lived in Xinguano aldeas, and make good informants.

114 As for the authors who have dealt with the Bakairí, we shall note among the best, Capistrano de Abreu and Karl von den Steinen. The former left us valuable information on the Bakairí language and on the beliefs of these Indians. The only weakness of his material is that it is based on only one

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114 informant. (3) Karl von den Steinen, on the other hand,

[113] 3. Capistrano de Abreu, "Os Bacaerys /Thè Bacairi/." Revista Brasileira, Year I, Volumes 3 and 4, Rio de Janeiro, 1895.

worked with several informants, and, what is more important in our opinion, personally visited Bakairí aldeas, (4) which

[113] 4. Karl von den Steinen, Durch Central-Brasilien /Through Central Brazil/, Leipzig, 1886; Unter den Naturvölkern Zentral-Brasiliens /Among the Central Brazilian Primitive Peoples/, Berlin, 1894.

[127] Capistrano did not do. These documents, studied comparatively, permit us /261/ to support the conclusions we expect to reach on Bakairí beliefs and customs.

197 The Bakairí belong to the Karaib /Carib/ linguistic
361 family. Their old aldeas consisted of large communal houses,
[342] ellipsoidal in form, around a square. In each house there
[592] lived from two to five families. In the center of the aldea
[344] there was a house, kadoeti, where the ceremonial adornments of the men were kept and where visitors were lodged. Access to the kadoeti was open not only to the men but to women
[346] and children as well. Attached to the kadoeti was a small
534 house, its entrance turned to the rising sun, where the flutes,
[784] buzzers or bull-roarer, and other sacred objects were kept. Access to this latter house was forbidden to women and children.

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352 The Bakairí slept in hammocks, amaka, woven of palm fiber.
[415] Their furnishings can be summed up as benches of a solid
[285] piece of wood, clay pots, mats and baskets. The diet rests
262 upon manioc, piquí, sweet potatoes, maize, and fish. How-
224 ever, the hunting of monkeys, wild pig, tapir, and other ani-
[241] mals was not scorned. Most of the food reserves, however, were of vegetable origin, and the most important harvests were made up of manioc, maize, sweet potatoes, and piquí. Yams /cará/, cotton, urucú, and tobacco were also planted.

342 The occupants of a communal house worked together on
476 the building of a new house, acquiring thereby the right to
622 reside in it. This construction work, however, was led by the individual who had the most prestige in the group, usually the old head of the house, who thus set himself up as the head of the new house. The tasks of clearing fields and planting
241 generally depended on the participation of all the aldea. When
476 beginning a new clearing, the Bakairí would give a feast,
529 kométe, with the distribution of food to the Indians who worked on the field. The Bakairí made canoes from the bark of the
501 jatobá tree, in the Xinguano way. This construction, as well
[824] as fishing, hunting, and agricultural activities, were accom-
[682] panied by propitiatory rituals.

Their products were bartered among neighboring groups
437 in the course of visits called tuliki which depended on the
574 presence of the chiefs of both aldeas. After the exchange of the objects desired, the visitors were honored with a feast called tulake.

621 /262/ The Bakairí were not a warlike people, and their
181 political organization does not seem very elaborate. Each
622 aldea had a chief, pima, assisted by a subchief, itáida. The
624 Bakairí do not remember the existence of a chief for the whole
[643] tribe, and there is no evidence that such a figure ever existed. The selection of the itáida was made by means of agreement of the aldea, but it generally fell on the son of the pima himself. The pima's functions were chiefly ceremonial, economic, and juridical.

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601 In their kinship system the Bakairí distinguished parallel
605 cousins (paigo and koro or iri and iia, for men or women, respectively for male or female Ego) from cross cousins (pama and imiapi or eisambi and ierudu, for men and women, respectively for male or female Ego). The former were
601 identified with brothers and sisters, respectively. The term
604 referring to the father, chogo, was extended to the father's brother, and the term referring to the mother, seko, was extended to the mother's sister. On the other hand, the mother's brother, kogo, and the father's sister, iupuri, got special
601 designations. There were special terms for male or female Ego, in Ego's generation (as we have already seen), and in the first descending generation. Thus the children of male Ego and those of Ego's brother were called imeri, without distinction of sex, while the children of Ego's sister were called tekau and uasi, respectively for the boy and girl. For female Ego, her children, as well as the children of Ego's sister, were called imeri, while Ego's brother's children were uadoin and uasi, respectively for boy and girl. In the second ascending
603 generation, the grandparents were distinguished according to sex, being called tako and nigo, respectively, for man and woman. In the second descending generation a single term, iveri, designated all individuals.

582 Marriage between cross cousins was common but not preferential. According to the data we obtained, there do not
606 seem to have been among the Bakairí any special rules concern-
591 ing residence or taboos referring to the father-in-law or mother-in-law, or moieties or clans. Marriage was usually monogamous,
595 although polygamous unions were allowed. Judging by the Xinguano tribes, it is probable that such polygamous unions assumed the form of a sororate.

784 /263/ The life cycle of the Bakairí was characterized by a series of seclusions, or uanki ("confinement"), during which individuals were protected against the numerous supernatural dangers that surrounded them.

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000 dangers that surrounded them. Pregnancy, enokua, was
843 recognized by the cessation of the menstrual periods. When
262 the abdomen of the pregnant woman began to attain visible
proportions, a diet based on vegetal foods and fish was initiated.
844 As the time of delivery drew near, a separate section was
[784] built inside the houses; the parturient was segregated and re-
mained uanki. Female relatives helped in the delivery under
the direction of an experienced woman. The parturient gave
[845] birth sitting on her heels. In difficult cases they washed her
abdomen and sides with a hot infusion of cotton leaves. The
umbilical cord was cut by the parturient herself or by her hus-
band, and it was buried along with the placenta outside the
844 house. After the birth, eraseli, the child was washed and
784 handed over to the parents; later it would be given the name
846 of some dead relative. During the birth and for some time
[553] afterward, the child and its parents remained in a state of
uanki. The end of the seclusion was signaled by the first
846 menstrual period of the parturient, and it was marked by a
796 feast called tadaumúto. The restoration of the parents and the
784 child to the bosom of the community was accomplished by
means of a feast called itabiénli.

When children reached puberty they were secluded,
uanki, for a period of several months. They could not come
out in daylight, and they were fed and looked after by their
[856] relatives. It was believed that the greater or lesser duration
of the young people's uanki period would lead to their better
[622] or worse physical constitution. On the other hand, a chief's
son had to remain in seclusion longer than usual. The period
881 of seclusion began for boys with the ritual of the perforation of
304 the ears (usually undergone in groups). Girls had their ears
784 perforated immediately after birth, and their seclusion was
marked by the advent of the first menses. The end of the uanki
784 state was also celebrated with the tadaumúto. The girls then
881 began to wear uluri, that is to say, triangular genital coverings
796 about three centimeters square made of tree bark.
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about three centimeters square made of tree bark. After the seclusion boys and girls were eligible for /264/ marriage. Marriage, todohokúinle, was joined by the parents of the young people by means of an exchange of gifts, and it does not seem to have merited any special ceremony.

The Bakairí do not seem to have believed in the possibility of a natural death. After death, which was always caused by the sorcery of some enemy, the corpse was painted and attired in the finery used in life. The corpse was rolled up in the hammock used by the deceased, and buried with the head pointing west and the feet east. There followed a mourning period, during which the closer relatives remained uanki and from which they emerged through the tadaunúto feast.

The world of the Bakairí was surrounded by supernatural beings, good and evil, such as the iamũra, topiehe, karoui, kadopa, and kilaimo. (5) Plants and animals were nothing but

5. Capistrano de Abeu, "Os Bacaerys," Revista Brasileira, Year I, Vol. 4, pp. 44, 45, 47, 48, 234, 240, 241. Rio de Janeiro, 1895.

drapery used by the iamura and kadopa. Hunting, fishing, and agricultural activities thus had to be accompanied by propitiatory activities intended to appease the anger of the iamũra deprived of their animals and plants. On the other hand, karoui and kilaimo wandered through the forest menacing the Bakairí. Against such beings the Indians required the protection of their sorcerer-doctors as well as periods of seclusion in the most dangerous moments.

The Bakairí believed that men had two souls: one called kati or kutiuu, heavier and thicker, corresponding to a camisa worn by the second soul, kagatopuri, a more fluid element that

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794 survives death. (o) During sleep, kagatopuri leaves the body

6. Capistrano de Abreu, op. cit., Vol. 4, pp. 43, 44.

and goes wandering through distant regions; on returning it [513] causes the individual to awaken. To awaken a person sudden- ly might kill him, for kagatopuri would not have time to re- 775 turn to the body. After death the fluid soul leaves the body once and for all and changes into kadopa. The kadopa are [776] wandering souls that continue in this way until their final transformation into iamũra which occurred in the domains of 796 Nakoeri, the culture hero. Nakoeri was a combination culture 793 hero and creator god of the Bakairí. In a /265/ text obtained by Capistrano de Abreu, Nakoeri first makes all the animals, and, using a plaster of clay, creates the Bakairí. (7) Next he

7. Capistrano de Abreu, op. cit., Vol. 4, p. 47.

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775 makes a cotton ladder and climbs to the sky.

796 The kadopa and iamũra suffer hunger and thirst and eat like the other Indians. For this they use the bodies of animals. 775 When the kadopa disturbed the aldeas, rituals were performed to try to attract the wandering souls in order next to frighten them. One Bakairí account refers to the kadopa thus:

775 789 539 "... if you do not intone kadopa's song he does not go to the sky. Because of this /after/ many days of sleeping put manioc paste /mingáu/ in two small clay cups /cũias/; put the paste in the middle of the grave; two persons armed with clubs intone the song; the cups are smashed and they flee. Coming from afar, one gives a blessing, saying ku ku ku (now, cheer up!).

/265 cont./

775 789 539 When finished, one gives a benediction... saying: Aufa! Go inside the sky, to our people, to our mother, to our father, here there is no one, inside the sky it is good, go, we also are going to pass away, it is said, the piahi teaches." (8)

8. Capistrano de Abreu, op. cit., Vol. 4, p. 44.

776 [775] In Nakoeri's aldea, the kadopa change into iamũra. But the iamũra also wander on the earth using the bodies of animals. Although their behavior was not intentionally malignant, the Bakairí had to take precautions when they went hunting or fishing or when they planted. On killing game or fish, the Indians left certain offerings for the iamũra portrayed by these animals. (9)

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9. Capistrano de Abreu, op. cit., Vol. 4, p. 49.

776 756 By means of certain rituals a Bakairí might, while still alive, make contact with the iamũra, acquiring the corresponding powers, and become a sorcerer-doctor.

776 Capistrano de Abreu (10) and Karl von den Steinen (11)

10. Capistrano de Abreu, op. cit., Vol. 4, pp. 235, 239, 240.

[113] 11. Karl von den Steinen, Entre os aborígenes do Brasil Central /Among the Aborigines of Central Brazil/, São Paulo, 1940, transl., p. 448.

mention yet other supernatural beings that surrounded the

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796 Bakairí: /266/ Kilaimo, Karoui, Iuanaguroro, and Topiehe. Kilaimo is a wandering spirit that wanders through the forest at night. Karoui is the sorcerer-doctor's enemy; he possesses an axe in the shape of a toad. Iuanaguroro is the lord of hunting; one of the sides of his chest is larger than the other, and he clasps against it and kills the Indians who offend him. Topiehe is a bird whose death would result inevitably in the death of the guilty party. There was also a lake inhabited by maleficent supernatural beings, and where animals reached gigantic proportions.

825 Capistrano de Abreu mentions the attribution of special powers to certain animals. Thus the lizard was the lord of sleep; the fox, of fire; the urubu, of benches; the sea snail, of the sun; the porcupine, of thorns; the kingfisher, of fishes; the deer, of manioc. (12)

12. Capistrano de Abreu, op. cit., Vol. 4, p. 242.

756 The sorcerer, piaji (piahi or piaje) performed very important functions among the Bakairí. Besides the function of curing illness, he performed such tasks as the prediction of enemy attacks, the localizing of game, the finding of lost objects, and interceding with supernatural beings when necessary.

753 For the Bakairí illness was always caused either by hostile sorcerers or those in the service of enemies, or by spirits such as the iamũra, topiehe, iuanaguroro, or karoui. On being 756 called to heal a sick person, the piaji requested the assistance 755 of his guardian iamũra with the help of a gourd which he shook in accompaniment to songs of invocation. On examining the patient, the piaji decided upon the cause of the illness, whether it had been induced by an enemy or by a spirit. In the second case, the piaji would intercede with the offended spirit, appeasing it. But in the event the illness had been

754 /266 cont./ But in the event the illness had been
755 caused by another sorcerer, it would be necessary to find out first the vehicle of the disease. This might be a small piece of charred wood, a thin cotton thread, or a small piece of bone, tossed from a distance and thus introduced into the patient's body. The sorcerer would suck at the afflicted part, thus withdrawing the cause of the illness.

754 /267/ Our informants could tell us nothing about diseases
[114] caused by omeoto (evil sorcerers) mentioned by Karl von den
[753] Steinen. According to the latter, in order to injure an Indian, a sorcerer would cook in a pot a lizard into whose throat he had previously inserted the skin of the middle finger of a corpse. The agony and death of the lizard were matched simultaneously by the agony and death of the victim. (13)

13. Karl von den Steinen, op. cit., p. 442.

[114] In our opinion, this method hardly seems to be indigenous and
[177] is probably the result of acculturation. However, our informants did not know about it.

756 In order to become a sorcerer, a youth had to undergo
[834] training for a period that lasted from six to 12 months, sub-
[262] mitting to rigorous sexual abstinence and an exclusively vegetal
[784] diet. Throughout the initiation period the candidate remained uanki, enclosed in the kaioeti. Part of the training, meanwhile, was carried out in distant places, where the novice learned the healing properties of certain roots, as well as the secrets related to the supernatural world. The training ended
[787] with the acquisition, on the candidate's part, of a guardian
[276] spirit, or iamüra. This acquisition was made during a trance into which the candidate has fallen by means of the ingestion of narcotic substances. After this the new sorcerer had to prove his power, either through small acts such as finding lost objects or by curing a sick person.

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In regard to initiation, Karl von den Steinen tells us that the candidate had to subsist solely on starch broth, hit himself continually on the head, and at the same time scratch his arms and chest until blood ran. (14) On the other hand,

14. Karl von den Steinen, op. cit., pp. 440-441.

Capistrano de Abreu relates that the novice had to swallow "drugs such as timbo, pindova, vaimbé, and other cipos" and learn the language of karoui. On the day of the initiation the candidate would go for a walk with his master, who gave him the infusion to drink. (15)

15. Capistrano de Abreu, op. cit., Vol. 4, pp. 235-238.

The Bakairí had quite an elaborate ceremonial system, as may be inferred from the information obtained /268/ the Indians of Simões Lopes. Dancing and singing were done not only when there was an abundance of food or when economic activities permitted it, but especially at times such as the maize harvest, or the occasion when the ears of the boys about to be secluded were pierced, or at times of the celebration of the tadaunúto, or end of the uanki state, the building of houses, the beginning of the clearing of a field, or finally the distribution of cotton among the women. On those occasions neighboring groups were invited and the festivities lasted for days. Bakairí musical instruments consisted of bamboo flutes and bells for the feet made of piquí shells. The informants recalled four kinds of flutes: enimi and kanagera, sacred flutes kept hidden from the eyes of women and children, and tadãua and nakigoro, used in secular festivities. The Bakairí also had gourds filled with seeds or stones, called pako, and wooden sticks decorated with geometric designs.

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534 sticks decorated with geometric designs. These sticks are still used in Bakairí dances in Simões Lopes.

535 533 Our informants remembered the following dances and songs: oriko, a dance performed with the help of the adorned sticks, at no specific time; iauaisári, the maize song; mahulauari, performed at the time of the construction of a new house; pahoevatá, performed at the time of the ceremony of the perforation of the boys' ears, and the maize celebration, or anjéintabiénli.

535 532 825 [784] In the sacred dances, barred to women, masks representing various animals were used. In our opinion these masks did not represent the animals proper but rather the iamüra, lords of these animals. This would justify the fact that these representations are so far removed from reality, even in terms of native art.

793 The Bakairí myths related by Karl von den Steinen and Capistrano de Abreu mention Tchini (or Keri, the sun), Numa (or Kame, the moon), (16) and Nakoeri. (17) Tchina and Numa

16. Karl von den Steinen, op. cit., pp. 447-492.

17. Capistrano de Abreu, op. cit., Vol. 4, pp. 45-50, 235-240.

or Keri and Kame, the sun and the moon, are twin creator heroes of the Bakairí. The same task of /269/ creating the [616] Bakairí is attributed to Nakoeri. The nonexistence of moieties [174] among the Bakairí leads us to regard the myth of the twin heroes as a borrowed feature, since there does not seem to be a justifying correspondence in their social organization. The 539 Paranatinga Indians told us the following myth:

Iamadili or the Origin of the Day.

In the beginning the world was so dark and so cold that the Indians had to cover their bodies with

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539 fat in order to stay warm. The Indians wanted the sun to come out, and so they donned their apparel, painted their bodies, and began to ask Orimoto, the great spirit. Orimoto was not an Indian but a man who lived in a stone house with some animals which he had created. The Indians went on asking until finally the light broke out; but the Indians had already grown old and the children had already grown up.

776 The data at our disposal do not permit us to place in Bakairí cosmology beings such as Tchini-numa, Keri-kamé, or Orimoto and Nakoeri. Nevertheless, we prefer to regard Nakoeri as the supreme being of the Bakairí, leaving to Tchini-numa, Keri-kamé (the sun and the moon), and Orimoto the role of culture heroes, until new work clarifies their respective functions.

182 13 433 Compelled to deal with a hostile environment, such as the savannas and forests of the headwaters of the Xingu, and lacking an adequate technology, the Bakairí, like the other Xinguano Indians, depended to a large extent on uncertain factors such as the amount of rainfall and the resulting annual increase of waters, which led to a scarcity or an abundance of food. Lacking an adequate technology, they did not store 789 their produce but lived on a subsistence economy. Their hunt- [224] ing and fishing activities were followed by magic rituals with [226] which they attempted to control the possibility of sudden future [241] calamities or even of illnesses. Thus agricultural activities [396] and the building of houses or canoes had to be followed by [782] propitiations. In order to utilize the vegetal or animal raw [262] materials, it was necessary to know how to control uncertain elements: How explain, for example, why one canoe splits and another does not, when both were made by the same craftsman? How explain how the same /270/ foods sometimes ap- 77 peared harmless and sometimes made people ill? The system of beliefs of the Bakairí seems to us an interpretation that

77 /270 cont./
satisfies effectively the cultural exigencies. The Bakairí lived in a world dominated by iamüra and other supernatural beings. Animals and plants were nothing more than draperies which were used by these supernatural beings. The Bakairi himself was a dual being: a spirit, kagatopüri, using a draping, the physical body, animated by another, denser spirit, kati. After death kagatopüri went through the stages of kadopa, a wandering spirit, and finally iamüra. For this reason the Bakairi did not appear to be afraid of their dead; bodies were more than vestments, but the kadopa were indeed dangerous.

784 182 In order to protect themselves against the innumerable dangers presented by the constellation of supernatural beings, such as iamüra, kadopa, topiehe, karoui, iuanaguroro, and kilaimo, the Bakairí used two methods. The first was seclusion, uanki, at the most difficult moments, such as birth, puberty, [796] death, and shamanistic initiation. Uanki was followed by the restoration of the individual /to the community/ through the 756 tadaunúto celebration. The other method was shamanism. 784 Shamanism was open to all and it must actually have consti- 182 tuted a normal stage in the life evolution of the Bakairí. Yet few of them managed to beçome sorcerers, for the trials they 756 had to undergo were not easy. Contact with the supernatural 787 was achieved by sorcerers through the use of tobacco or other 276 narcotic substances. In their trances the sorcerers came to control the iamüra and acquired the powers peculiar to these supernatural beings.

775 Finally, the post-mortem life of the Bakairí, in Nakoeri's large aldea, reflects as might be expected the organization of their aldeas. Once changed into iamüra, the Bakairí join their ancestors and old friends; the pleasures of eating and drinking are not denied them since they also feel hunger and thirst, but they are now invulnerable to the perils of the forest. They can use the animals and plants, at their pleasure, as wrappers for their wanderings through the air, in the rivers, or on the ground.

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000 /The bibliography on p. 271 has been omitted in the translation; see the foreign text. The following "Abstract" is given in English in the original text./

/271/ Abstract

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Certain aspects of the culture of the Bakairi Indians of Mato Grosso are briefly described: their technology, kinship terminology, pantheon, cerimonies, shamanism, treatment of illness, and the series of ritualistic seclusions, or wanki, that occur at stated intervals during the life cycle: at birth, at puberty, at death and upon becoming a shaman. Ritualistic seclusion, or wanki, is one of the two means employed as defenses against harm of supernatural origin, the other means being shamanism.